

10/21/2008

## Detection dogs sniff out cell phones at demonstration in Hagerstown

By ERIN JULIUS  
[erinj@herald-mail.com](mailto:erinj@herald-mail.com)

- [Texas death row inmate made threatening calls from smuggled cell phone](#)

HAGERSTOWN — Alba, an 18-month-old Belgian Malinois, bounded into a conference room and leaped onto Maj. Peter Anderson. While most dogs are trained not to jump on people, Alba was just doing her job.

"She found my personal cell phone," Anderson said to a small gathering of his fellow correctional officers, who were in Hagerstown this week to learn about detection dogs, specifically dogs like Alba that are trained to sniff out cell phones.

K-9 officers and commanders from Washington, D.C., Kansas, Pennsylvania, Oregon, South Dakota and New Jersey gathered at the Sleep Inn off Sharpsburg Pike for the training session led by Anderson.

Alba's assigned task was to determine which of four television sets had cell phones hidden inside of them. She moved around the four televisions that were set up in a row on the floor of the conference room before returning to the third television.

She pointed her nose and laid down, intently looking at the television. As a reward, Alba got to play with a ball given to her by her handler.

Maryland is the first state to train its own cell phone-detection dogs. Prison officials hope to breed their own cell phone-detection dogs in the future, Department of Public Safety and Correctional

Services spokesman Mark Vernarelli said. The DOC's K-9 breeding program is based on Roxbury Road south of Hagerstown.

The Maryland Division of Correction's K-9 unit has 20 handlers, all of whom have a drug dog. The division also has three cell phone-detection dogs in the field and seven patrol dogs, Anderson said.

During a scan at an institution, the dogs search mostly the inmate housing areas and common areas. Inmates generally hide contraband outside of their own living quarters so it can't be traced to them, he said.

K-9 handlers and their partners recently found six cell phones hidden in a mop bucket in a Baltimore facility.

"In Maryland, as in other jurisdictions, cell phones continue to be one of our biggest contraband," said James Peguese, assistant commissioner for security operations.

By using cell phones from prison, "the criminal element maintains control of their businesses, drugs and otherwise," Peguese said Monday morning.

The Division of Correction's K-9 unit is headquartered in Hagerstown with three satellite offices throughout the state. Alba and her handler, Sgt. David Brosky, visited Monday from Jessup, Md.

Alba started her job at the end of June and has found 16 cell phones in institutions throughout the DOC, Brosky said. The three cell phone-detection dogs have found 33 phones since they started in June, Anderson said. The K-9 trainers will consider the discovery of 60 phones in a year a success, he said.

Alba and her co-workers not only sniff out contraband, they serve as a deterrent.

When the K-9 officers come to search a housing area, inmates try to get rid of contraband, officers said.

"A lot of stuff ends up getting flushed as soon as they know we're on the tier," Anderson said.

Cmdr. Terrance Wilson has worked with the Washington, D.C., Department of Corrections since 2004, when he first trained with the Maryland DOC. His K-9 unit has seven dogs and six handlers. Another dog is being trained in Hagerstown and will be ready to join his unit in December, Wilson said.

Sgt. Robert Wolfe of the Lancaster County (Pa.) Prison has five dogs that do patrol and protection work. Anderson has been talking to Wolfe's bosses, who sent him to this week's training to get a detection program started.



Sgt. David Brosky of the Maryland Department of Corrections K-9 unit watches as Alba finds a cell phone hidden inside a television as part of a demonstration of cell phone sniffing dogs, Monday in Hagerstown. **(Credit: Colleen Helf / Staff Photographer)**